



Afghan recruits await the issue of uniforms and equipment by U.S. special forces soldiers at a Kabul training site.

# Training an Afghan Army



Story by Gunnery  
Sgt. Charles Portman, USMC





SGT Kevin P. Bell

*Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group, are helping train the soldiers who will become the nucleus of the new — and united — Afghan National Army.*



SGT Kevin P. Bell

**A recruit is measured for a pair of boots using a simple but efficient “size board” that speeds the process.**

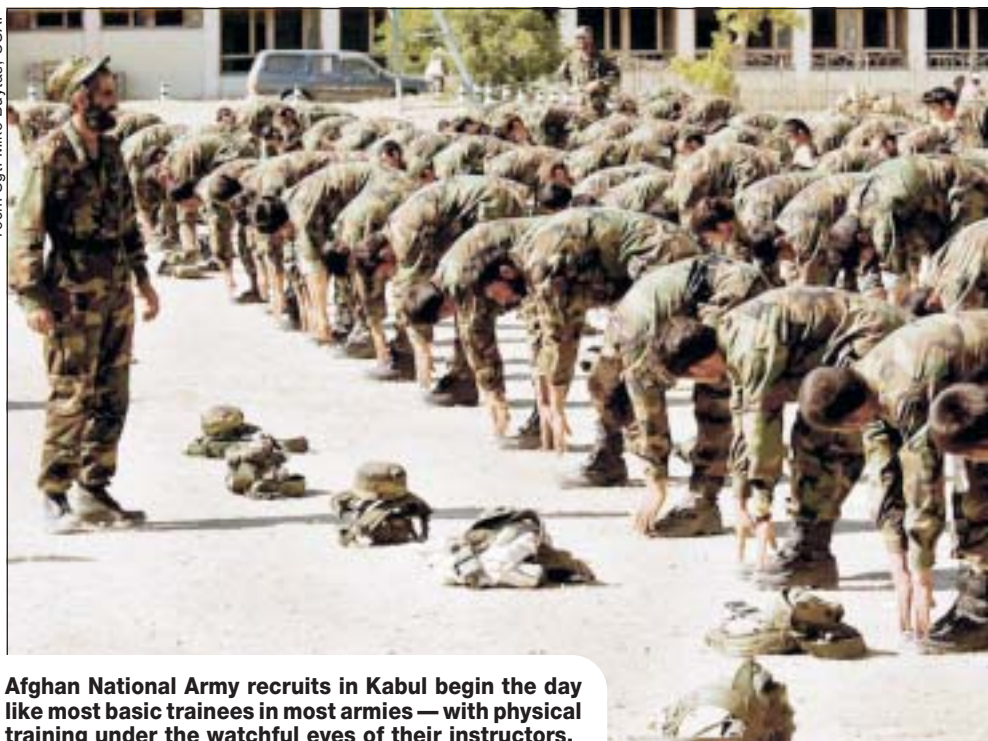
**T**EACHING Afghan army recruits how to be soldiers may be a new phase in the global war on terrorism, but the Army’s special forces soldiers have long trained foreign troops. And, Army officials say, it’s a skill they’ve mastered.

In recent years Green Berets from the 1st Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group, have traveled to many remote places around the world, completing missions to free the oppressed, which is what their motto, “De Oppresso Liber,” means.

“This is what we do,” said LTC Kevin M. McDonnell, commander of

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Tech. Sgt. Mike Buytas, USAF



**Afghan National Army recruits in Kabul begin the day like most basic trainees in most armies — with physical training under the watchful eyes of their instructors.**





Tech. Sgt. Mike Buyias, USAF

**An Afghan trainee attempting to disassemble an AK-47 while blindfolded gets a helping hand from a special forces soldier.**

the unit. “This is one of our core missions, and it’s a privilege to be involved.”

Unified commanders commonly issue orders to U.S. Army special forces to engage in foreign internal defense missions, similar to the current Afghan National Army training mission, to enhance regional stability.

Special forces soldiers conduct FID and unconventional-warfare missions during times of war and peace, McDonnell said. “For most of the U.S. soldiers involved in the training mission, this is the career opportunity of a lifetime.”

In 1996 the battalion was the first U.S. special-operations unit to conduct African Crisis Response Initiative training, a program in which Green Berets worked with various African states to create effective, rapidly deployable peacekeeping units. To date, more than 5,500 African troops have been trained under the program.

More recently, in Operation Focus





Relief, the unit contributed to United Nations peacekeeping operations in several West African countries.

The Focus Relief initiative equipped and trained seven battalions from West African countries to conduct peace-enforcement operations in Sierra Leone. The training ended in December 2001.

Soldiers from McDonnell's unit now are faced with the daunting challenge of developing the nucleus of a national army with recruits representing all of Afghanistan's provinces. The unit is ready to form one new battalion every two weeks if the Afghanistan Interim Authority's recruiting efforts can supply such a demand, McDonnell said. With current resources, training of up to four battalions can take place simultaneously.

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*"We are perfectly capable of handling 2,400 recruits at any given time."*

**Afghan recruits' AK-47s rest against the wall as their owners attend classroom training at the Kabul site.**



Tech. Sgt. Mike Buytas, USAF

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**Recruits line up to turn in their weapons after training. U.S. special forces soldiers will ultimately train several hundred Afghans.**

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U.S. instructors are also establishing a cadre of commissioned and noncommissioned Afghan officers who eventually will take over the country's military training programs.

Officials worldwide who are watching Afghanistan evolve wonder whether an effective national army can be built with men representing the country's various ethnic groups.

Mohammed Ali, from Kabul, hopes that a new country with a unified army succeeds. He left Afghanistan nine years ago because of poor living conditions, he said. When the interim government was formed and things started getting better, he "decided to join the army, to be trained for our people and to serve with soldiers from all nationalities; with the Pashtuns, Tajiks and the Hazaras.

"I believe that all nationalities in Afghanistan have to come together, because we have suffered," he said.

Special forces instructors are well aware of the trainees' ethnic differences and are working to build a racially unbiased army.

CPT "Slim," an operational detachment team leader using a nickname for security reasons, said the morale of his men is outstanding. His team was among the first to start training Afghan recruits. "To be able to say we were a part of this is extremely exciting," he said.

McDonnell said the training will result in "an Afghan national army capable of providing security to its people and ensuring a stable environment to foster economic development." □

## A Patch for Afghanistan's Army

AFGHANISTAN'S National Army has developed an insignia that underscores the latest chapter of their country's military history.

The centerpiece on the 1st Battalion patch is an outline of Afghanistan beneath a fountain pen and crossed rifles. The pen signifies the rewriting of Afghanistan's history and the soldiers' intent to learn and become better educated. The words "God is Great" are embroidered near the top of the patch. Unit identification — 1st Bn., National Army — is inscribed below two sheaves of wheat. Near the bottom of the patch a small black, red and green rectangle replicates the colors of Afghanistan's national flag.

Though guided by their U.S. trainers, Afghan soldiers designed the patch themselves. Faqir Mohommad, a 26-year-old recruit from Qanduz, rendered the first artist's drawing of the patch and solicited input from his fellow soldiers.

Approximately 500 officer and enlisted trainees make up the 1st Battalion, which is being trained at a base camp near Kabul by soldiers from the 1st Bn., 3rd Special Forces Group.

Other battalions that will be formed and take part in the training are expected to use the same patch, but with their own battalion designation.

— MAJ Ralph Mills,  
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